



Relativism, Alternate History, and the Forgetful Reader: Reading Science Fiction and Historiography

Derek Thiess

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The writer of alternate history asks “what if?” What if one historical event were different, what would the world look like today? In a similar way, the postmodern philosopher of history suggests that history is literature, or that *if* we read certain historical details differently we *would* get a distinctly different interpretation of past events. While the science fiction alternate history means to illuminate the past, to increase our understanding of past events, however, the postmodern approach to history typically suggests that such understanding is impossible. To the postmodern philosopher, history is like literature in that it does not offer the reader access to the past, but only an interesting story. Building on criticism that suggests personal psychological reasons for this obscuring the past, and using a literary theory of readership, this book challenges the postmodern approach to history. It channels the speculative power of science fiction to read the works of postmodern philosophy of history as alternate histories themselves, and to map the limits and pathology of their forgetful reading of the past.

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Oliver Whitley:

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